

Common Questions Muslims Ask about Islam

My American born Muslim daughters often ask me questions about things in Islam that confuse them or seem contradictory. I get similar questions from community members, parents and youth alike. I will attempt to address some of these questions here Insha Allah.

There are multiple chapters with page breaks between them so please page down to next chapter when you finish a section.

Chapter 1

Question 1: Guidance (Hedayah) and what it means

Here we have two seemingly contradicting verses in the Quran even though they are not:

“Verily, you (O Muhammad) guide not whom you like” [al-Qasas 28:56] and “And verily, you (O Muhammad) are indeed guiding (mankind) to the Straight Path” [al-Shooraa 42:52]

Also, when Allah SWT says: “Whoever Allah guides there is no one that can misguide him and whoever Allah misguides, no one can guide him”. If Allah SWT “misguides” then why would He punish those that stray away from the right path?

Two types of guidance

There are two types of guidance that Allah SWT gives us in the Quran: guidance in showing the way and the blessings to follow the guidance even when our own instincts or culture fight such guidance.

To the first I quote from Surah Al-Insan: “We guided him (mankind) to the way either grateful or a disbeliever”. And Surah Al-Shams: “And by the soul and He who created it and showed it its wickedness and guidance “. Surah Al-Balad: “We guided him to both paths [good and bad]”.

The blessings (Tawfique) to follow the guidance that Allah SWT shows you is predicate on a number of things:

- 1- Allah SWT says “Whoever believes in Allah [then Allah] will guide his heart”.
- 2- In Surah Muhammad Allah SWT says: “While as for those who accept guidance, He increases their guidance and bestows on them their piety.” And “As for those who strive hard in Us (Our Cause), We will surely guide them to Our paths” (Al-‘Ankaboot)
- 3- Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in a Hadith said that “Allah said that whoever comes to me a foot I come to him a yard and whoever comes to me walking, I come to him running”

These quotes indicate that the first step is to up to mankind: believing before guidance and walking toward Allah to get nearer to Him. In Surah Yunus:

“Say: ‘O you mankind! Now truth (i.e. the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad), has come to you from your Lord. So whosoever receives guidance, he does so for the good of his own self; and whosoever goes astray, he does so to his own loss; and I am not (set) over you as a Wakeel (disposer of affairs to oblige you for guidance).”

Misguidance

So what does it mean when Allah SWT says and “Whoever Allah misguides then no one can guide”? Here misguidance refers to the fact that Allah SWT will not help the one who insists on rejecting Allah. In Surah Al-Zumar, Allah SWT says: “Allah does not guide the one who is a liar and consistent disbeliever”.

Chapter 2

Question 2: Fate (Qadr) and preordained destiny

Belief in Qadr (fate) is one of the pillars of Iman (faith) in Islam. Yet many Muslims are confused about its meaning. Here are common verses people use:

“You will not will [for anything] unless Allah wills [first]”

“Say nothing will happen to us unless what Allah has written upon us”

Many Hadiths of the prophet (PBUH) indicate everything that ever happened or will ever happen in the universe is already written. One hadith I quote here:

“The creation of each one of you is gathered together in his mother's belly for forty days in the form of a seed, then he is a clot of blood for a like period. The angel is then sent to him to blow the breath of life into him. He is commanded to write down four matters: his means of livelihood, life-span, actions, and whether happy or unhappy.” (Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Two types of Qadr

Once again we find two types of Qadr (events that happen to us):

- 1- Things of our own doing whether doing good or bad
- 2- Events outside of our control like being rear ended on the highway, falling sick, or death either our own or a close relative

The first (our own will):

Allah SWT enabled us and gave us the guidance and mandated that we obey Him. It would be grave injustice if Allah SWT willed for us to be bad and then punished us for our sins.

On the contrary, Allah SWT does not punish us when we are forced into sin under the threat of torture or fear of loss of life or death. Allah SWT says that “Except the one who is forced without himself] being in mischief or [the] aggressor” and “except who is forced while his heart is peaceful with Iman (belief in Allah”.

Indeed Allah SWT says that “Allah does not burden a soul except of what it can bear” (Al-Baqarah).

However, we must rely on Allah’s help in achieving what we want. Allah SWT says (Al-Kahf):

“Do not say I am doing something tomorrow except if Allah wills”. We may not live to see tomorrow or unforeseen circumstances prevent us from being able to fulfill our intentions. This does not give us right to break our promises to people once made. It simply means we will exert all of our human abilities to

honor our promises while we believe that Allah SWT has ultimate power to inflict things upon us that are beyond our control.

The second (things that happen to us):

Life is a test and we cannot simply state that we believe in Allah SWT without being tested. Allah SWT says:

“Do people believe that they will be left [or it is enough] to say we believe without being tested”.

Allah SWT promised” We will test you with things of fear; hunger; diminishing of money, persons and fruits; and give glad tidings to those who are patient”.

The beauty of this believe in Islam that it gets us quickly over the denial, anger and guilt stages of grief and we move quickly to acceptance albeit with sadness and sorrow.

Can fate be changed?

Allah SWT says in the Quran:

“Allah affirms whatever He wants or erases”. In the books of Tafseer on this Ayah it narrates that Omar used to pray: “Oh, Allah, if you wrote me as a disbeliever, erase that and change me to a believer”.

In fact, the power of dua’a (prayers) is mentioned in so many places in the Quran:

“Who [other than Allah] will answer the call of the needy and alleviates the wrong?”

“If my slaves ask you about me then I am near answering the prayers of the one who calls on me; let them answer my call and believe in me so that they may receive guidance”.

Indeed in a Hadith narrated by Ahmad and deemed Hassan prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

“Nothing can change the Qadr except dua’a”.

Qadr descends from heaven while dua’a ascends up there and one may overpower the other. In a Hadith reported by Al-Hakim, prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

"Dua’a benefits in the things that have happened as well as the things that have not happened yet. The calamity comes down, but the Du`a’ confronts it and they may continuously wrestle until the Day of Resurrection."

Persistence in doing better can help: Allah SWT says in Surah Al-Shams:

“He who gives and fears Allah, we will make it easy for him to do well. And whoever withholds and considers himself not in need [of Allah], we will make it easier for him to do bad”.

Allah SWT also says in Surah Al-Talaq:

“Whoever fears Allah we will give him a way out [of trouble] and give him sustenance (Risq from places he did not foresee.” And in the same Surah:

“Whoever fears Allah then [Allah] will make his matters easier.”

Chapter 3

Why push us so hard when we are so much better than many?

I heard this statement from a parent whose child told him this after the father asked the teen boy to do extra good deeds.

Then just few days later my daughters told me as they were showing an unflattering post by a friend on Facebook or Instagram: “Dad, you and mom should feel so lucky and blessed because of us; see what this friend posted online.”

My response to them was:

“When you are in school, do you look at the bad students with low grades (Ds and Fs) and say I will be satisfied with a C or do you aspire to be better than them and be a B+ or an A student?”

“Do you look at the poor people who do not have much in life and say I do not need to work harder to make more money when these people can live on so much less?.”

We find it easier for people to compare and work harder about worldly things. But when it comes to Jannah, some are willing to work less and are content with so much less.

On the contrary, aspiring toward Jannah is what Allah SWT asked us to compete with one another or to work harder.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us to aspire to the highest:

“If you ask Allah the Jannah then ask him for the Firdous Al-A’la (the highest and best).”

We need every extra Hassanah that we can get

Allah SWT said: Whoever does a molecular weight of good will see [the results] and whoever does a molecular weight of wrong will see it.”

Allah SWT also says: “Make prayers both ends of the day and extra in the nights; good deeds wash away bad deeds.”

Obeying Allah SWT leads to a good life while doing bad leads to misery

In addition to the Ayahs in Surah Al-Talaq that I quoted in the previous chapter, Allah SWT says in Surah Al-Nahl:

“Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do.”

Allah SWT also says:

“Whoever turned his back on My remembrance then he shall lead a difficult life and resurrect him blind. He said O’ my Lord why you resurrected me blind and I was able to see; He [Allah] said this is how you forget our signs when they came to you and like that you shall be forgotten today.”

Please note that [difficult life] does not mean a life without riches or fame. On the contrary many of the people who commit suicide are rich or famous people. Their riches and fame may be a much bigger cause of misery to them than had they not be as rich or famous.

The blessings in life are to be content with what Allah SWT gave you and be patient when He deprives you of something. Know that being deprived may be better for you as Allah SWT says:

“If Allah expands income (Risq) to His slaves they would transgress on earth”.